

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 8, 2005

The Honorable Donald Rumsfeld
Secretary of Defense
The Pentagon
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Secretary Rumsfeld:

We are deeply concerned by reports that the Pentagon has failed to identify and fulfill urgent requests for equipment essential to saving the lives of our troops in the field.

On numerous occasions, equipment requirements have been underestimated and needed materiel has not reached the field in a timely manner. We have seen this with body armor, vehicle add-on armor, and the production of new, up-armored HMMWVs (Humvees).

Now, news reports indicate that soldiers are dying unnecessarily for lack of inexpensive tourniquets. The *Baltimore Sun* reported on March 6, 2005 that the U.S. Central Command issued a policy earlier this year stating that every soldier in the Iraq and Afghanistan war zones should carry a tourniquet, but that fielding of a new first-aid kit containing tourniquets has been delayed "while the Army conducts tests to determine the best pouch to put it in, which could take several months." The article cited tourniquet manufacturers who indicated they can quickly produce as many tourniquets as are needed. It also indicates that National Guard and Reserve units may be more likely than regular Army units to be risking their lives without a ready supply of this simple, inexpensive first-aid device.

If this report is accurate, then two months after the policy was promulgated, our troops are still waiting for this life-saving tool due to a bureaucratic face-off over what pouch to put it in – a debate which press reports note could take several more months to resolve. This type of delay is disturbing during times of peace, but in the midst of the armed conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, it is nothing short of appalling. A number of our bravest military personnel have reportedly bled to death on the battlefield, and the experts have determined that putting a tourniquet in the hands of every soldier is a vital life-saving measure. Holding up the fielding of a life-saving medical kit simply to optimize its carrying pouch suggests a mindset oblivious to the wartime needs of our soldiers.

At your earliest opportunity, please provide answers to the following questions: What is the timetable for achieving the goal of equipping every soldier in Iraq with a tourniquet? Why was a concern about pouches allowed to significantly delay implementation of the January 6th CENTCOM directive? Are tourniquets less prevalent in National Guard and Reserve units despite the heavy burden they are carrying in this war and, if so, why have these units been left behind?

The string of equipment delays we have seen begs a larger question. Troop safety should be a high priority in our war effort, and that means giving soldiers the equipment they need to protect them from injury and save their lives when they are injured. Why do we continually find ourselves behind the curve in this war, scrambling to provide basic equipment and protection to our troops only after too many of them suffer grievous injuries? What are you doing to change the thinking within the Pentagon to better anticipate equipment needs, to ensure that when a need is identified it is filled in an expedited fashion, and to ensure that Guard and Reserve units receive that equipment at the same time as regular Army units?

It is time for a thorough review of the Joint and Service processes used to forecast equipment requirements, identify emerging needs, and acquire and field solutions swiftly. We urge you to initiate a high-level process to determine how to break through the inertia and delays so that our troops on the battlefield can have the equipment they need.

We look forward to your prompt response to the questions we have asked and your consideration of the need for a broader effort to address this problem.

Sincerely,



Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator



Carl Levin
United States Senator